

Turlock Lake State Recreation Area
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La Grange, California 95329
(209) 874-2008

Caswell Memorial State Park
28000 South Austin Road
Ripon, CA 95366
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McConnell State Recreation Area
McConnell Road
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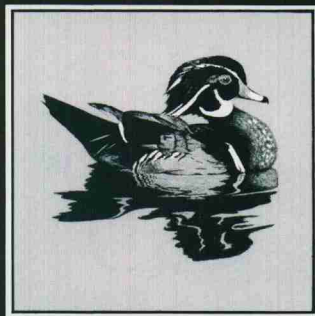
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Turlock Lake State Recreation Area

Nestled in the rolling foothills of eastern Stanislaus County, Turlock Lake State Recreation Area is an ideal place for day- or week-long outings. Open all year and featuring camping, picnicking, fishing, swimming, boating, water-skiing, and clean country air, the area offers visitors an opportunity to see the wonderful variety of native plant life that once flourished alongside the rivers of the San Joaquin Valley. The mark of man can be seen in dredger tailings and agricultural developments that date from the turn of the century.

Bounded on the north by the Tuolumne River and on the south by Turlock Lake, the recreation area provides an ideal setting for water-oriented outdoor activities. The recreation area features the 3,500-surface-acre lake with its 26 miles of shoreline and some 228 acres of foothill country leased from the Turlock Irrigation District in 1950. Day use and boating facilities are available, and camping facilities are located alongside the Tuolumne River. In summer, the lake may be drawn down to 1,800 surface acres. Impounded by the Turlock Irrigation District in 1913, the lake's greatest depth, when full, is 45 feet.

The Weather

At elevation 250 feet, the recreation area boasts typical San Joaquin Valley weather, with warm summers and mild winters. During the summer months night-time temperatures usually drop to the high sixties and are comfortable for sleeping. Quick relief from even the warmest summer day is available in the cool waters of Turlock Lake.

From several lookout points, the visitor can view the surrounding grasslands and some of the dairy farms and cattle ranches nearby. And from the highway that separates the campground from the day use area, an excellent view is offered of the campground, the river and sloughs, and miles of dredger tailing piles, the by-product of a half century of gold mining.

Mining

A common sight along many of California's rivers, these piles of rock were left behind by the giant dredges used to extract gold. Dredging companies purchased or leased thousands of acres of land to mine for their mineral deposits. Using giant buckets on chains, the floating dredges dug through the soil to the bedrock at a depth of about 30 feet. The gold-bearing sands were washed and screened to separate them from the larger material which were then left as tailing piles.

The La Grange Dredging Company was formed in 1905 to extract the gold from an eight-mile section of the river, including the portion now within the

recreation area. Several million of dollars in gold were extracted before dredging operations stopped in 1952 due to increased costs and a diminishing gold supply.

The River

The Tuolumne is the largest tributary of the San Joaquin River. It originates high on the north slope of Mount Lyell in Yosemite National Park. Leaving the upland meadows, the river flows into Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which supplies water for San Francisco, and further downstream flows into New Don Pedro Reservoir, where water is stored to irrigate fields and orchards and to produce electricity.

The annual runoff of the river varies from a high of 5,000,000 acre feet to as little as 55,000 acre feet depending on the amount and kind of precipitation in the watershed.

Camping

With a sheer bluff rising on its south boundary and the Tuolumne River on the north, a secluded campground offers 67 improved campsites on level ground that, many years ago, served as the river's natural flood plain. Ample shade is provided by native trees, and the heavy growth of native blackberries entices jam and pie fanciers from mid-July through October. Trails have been cut through the blackberries to the river's edge. There is some poison oak, too, so care is advised.

Each campsite has a stove, table, and food locker, and piped drinking water is within a hundred feet of each. Hot showers and restrooms with flush toilets are nearby. Paved roads lead to each campsite, and each has parking.

An artesian well accessible via a footbridge over a small stream offers drinking water with a special flavor that you may be able to identify.

Although no trailer hookups are available, trailers up to 18 feet in length can be accommodated in the campsites. The campground fills daily from mid-June through mid-September, so reservations are advisable. When the campground is filled, park personnel will be happy to direct you to one of several nearby public or private campgrounds.

Day Use

Along the lake shore two formal picnic areas, lots of shade trees, and an irrigated turf area can accommodate large numbers of people. One area offers 20 tables, piped drinking water, and ample turf for "blanket" picnickers. The other area contains 30 tables, 12 fireplaces, and piped drinking water. Portable barbecues are nearby to accommodate swimmers, boaters, and picnickers alike. No lifeguard is on duty, so swimmers should use caution and parents should keep a sharp eye on youngsters.

The concessionaire-operated marina, open between April and October, offers boat fuel, boat mooring, prepared food and drinks, groceries, fishing tackle, and other supplies. Wood also is sold, as forest litter in the recreation area should not be picked up.

There is a boat launching ramp and ample parking for boat trailers and cars.

For the fisherman, trout, black bass, crappie, bluegill, and catfish are found in all waters near the recreation area.

Flora and Fauna

Although most trees on the lake shore have been planted, the rich riparian habitat along the river boasts some 190 species of flowers, herbs, shrubs, and ferns. So far 115 species of birds have been identified in the area, and this is not a complete list.

More common species of birds include jays, woodpeckers, magpies, meadowlarks, valley quail, hawks, hummingbirds, orioles, wrens, bush tits, mourning doves, western bluebirds, Brewer's and red-winged blackbirds, common house finches, greenbacked goldfinches, brown and spotted towhees, golden-crowned sparrows, barn and screech owls, and turkey vultures. On the water and along the shore during fall and winter, mallards, canvasbacks, coots, white-fronted geese, several kinds of herons, grebes, gulls, and terns are of common occurrence. Eagles are occasionally sighted in the Turlock Lake area.

Other wildlife to be found include the opossum, raccoon, gray fox skunk, beaver, coyote, muskrat, black-tailed jackrabbit, Audubon cottontail, wood rats, bullfrogs, turtles, and an occasional deer. The sloughs especially teem with aquatic life to thrill the young amateur naturalist.

Along the lake at the concession area are cottonwoods, western sycamores, and willows. A short distance away, valley and blue oaks dot the hillsides in small clusters. Native trees also include the interior live oak, Fremont cottonwood, willows, white alder, blue elderberry, Oregon ash, and California buckeye.

The campground is well supplied with moisture which makes a lush location for the native trees, grasses and wildflowers. Wild grapes and blackberries grow profusely, with scatterings of toyon, mock orange, and elderberry to add color. Wildflowers include blue and white lupine, giant muhly, daisies, fuschias, sunflowers, monkeyflowers, larkspurs, wallflowers, and Mariposa lilies. Woodwardia ferns grow in moist places along the cliff, and a multitude of other flowers, shrubs, and ferns dot the area.

Near the campground entrance station, a single dawn redwood (not native to California as are the Coast and Sierra redwoods) survives from those dedicated in 1952 by the Modesto Chapter of the Native Daughters of the Golden West. The grove was dedicated to C.C.

Wright, author of the Irrigation Act of 1887, and his wife, Mamie Swain Wright, a pioneer resident of this area.

Location

Turlock Lake State Recreation Area is located 21 miles east of Modesto and about the same distance north and east of Turlock. It is a short drive off State Highway 132, and a well-signed intersection tells you where to turn off the highway to reach the area.

McConnell State Recreation Area

McConnell State Recreation Area, named after a pioneer family that once ranched nearby, offers year-round recreation in a shady oasis, a small island of peace and quiet in the midst of twenty million Californians. The first state park unit in the San Joaquin Valley, the 74-acre recreation area opened in 1950 and is now visited by thirty-five thousand people annually. Several grassy play areas offer the youngsters ample room to romp, and the low, easy, summer flow of the Merced River is great for swimming. Anglers can fish for catfish, black bass and perch; a valid California sport-fishing license is required.

The bottom land along the river consists of a rich, sandy loam. Before the coming of white settlers, this soil supported a luxuriant growth of trees, shrubs, vines and wildflowers that provided abundant food and a place of refuge to the Indians and wildlife of the San Joaquin Valley. Today, rich farm lands surrounding the recreation area grow field, row, and nut crops, and there is some poultry and cattle ranching. Only in a few isolated spots, as at the recreation area, is the original streamside habitat preserved.

The sandy shore and river bottom are excellent for swimming and beach play, but swimmers should beware of deep holes. No lifeguard service is available.

Facilities

The park's camping and picnic areas contain rock fireplaces, tables, and piped drinking water. The family campsites have food lockers, and the picnic area has a few hibachi-like stoves mounted on convenient, waist-level pipestands among the rock fireplaces. The group picnic area (capacity 150) has two rock fireplaces and a large barbecue pit. There is also a 40-person group campground. Park personnel offer interpretive programs on Saturday nights during the summer at an outdoor theater next to the group campground.

Plants and Wildlife

McConnell is a spacious park with lawns and trees. Valley oak, box elder and cottonwood are the primary native trees; sycamore, fruitless mulberry, elm, and

Modesto ash have been introduced. There are dense areas of native elderberry, box elder, wild grape, and blackberry.

The careful observer may see raccoons, opossums, weasels, muskrats, ground squirrels, skunks, cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, and even an occasional beaver or black-tailed deer. Common birds include valley quail, woodpeckers, robins, crows, yellow-billed magpies, ring-necked pheasants, and several kinds of hawks as well as ducks, geese, and ban-tailed pigeons during their annual migrations.

Caswell Memorial State Park

Caswell Memorial State Park is six miles southwest of Ripon in the San Joaquin Valley. It abounds with wildlife such as opossum, skunk, raccoon, fox, rabbit, muskrat, and the beautiful wood duck.

The valley oak — *Quercus lobata* — found in the park is native only to California and grows best in the low flatlands, although it can also be found in the Coast Range to the west.

The park's 138 acres of valley oak are but a remnant of the large, hardwood forest that once covered much of the Central Valley's river banks and floor plains. Demand for firewood and efforts to clear the land for agriculture in past years reduced the virgin forest to a few isolated stands. Some of the stands protected in the park contain trees more than 60 feet high with girths of over 17 feet.

Minnie Elizabeth Pope, reflecting on her childhood years here in the late 1800's said "I could ride all over the place. We had many points of interest: a biggest oak tree and a tree that had been burned and had a buzzard's nest in it. I would go to see the young every spring. There was a beaver dam, a woodchopper's cabin, a pen to catch wild hogs, and the Indian burying ground. We cut as much as 300 cords of wood a season."

Part of her pioneering family's ranch is preserved within the park. It remains much as they, and the Caswells who bought the ranch in 1915, knew it.

An interpretive display giving the history of the park is at the head of the Oak Forest Nature Trail. The trail winds through fine stands of valley oak and along the Stanislaus River where a tangle of undergrowth provides protection and food for the wildlife. Outside the oak forest a wide variety of tree and plant life can be found including wild roses, wild currant, and rambling blackberry.

Another trail 100 feet north of the display leads to a point where one can observe a great blue-heron rookery on the park's undeveloped west side, a popular field study area. Visitors should not approach within a quarter of a mile of the herons or they will abandon their nests.

Water Sports

The Stanislaus River, which winds through the park, has a beach and swimming area close to the day-use facilities and campground. Fishing is at its best in the summer when there are striped, largemouth and smallmouth bass, sturgeon, blue gill, catfish, shad, and buffalo carp. In the fall salmon and steelhead can be caught. Boats may be operated in the San Joaquin River, five miles west of the park.

Although valley temperatures reach the high 90's in summer, the shaded camp and picnic areas are often 15 degrees cooler. Family and group picnic facilities are available near the park's interpretive display. Tables and stoves are provided, but because of the extreme fire hazard, open fires are not permitted.

Campground

In a pleasant wooded area beside the river there are 65 camp sites each with a table, stove, and food locker. Piped drinking water and comfort stations with hot showers are nearby. Reservation applications for the group campgrounds are available at park headquarters.

Campsite Reservations

Campsite reservations for all three of the state parks described in this brochure can be made by phone up to eight weeks in advance. Call MISTIX at 1-800-446-PARK between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m., seven days a week. Outside California call 619-452-1950. Reservation fees can be charged to Visa or MasterCard. Group camp reservations can be made up to twelve weeks in advance.

Reservations can be made in person Monday through Saturday at any MISTIX outlet. To locate the nearest MISTIX outlet call 1-800-952-5580.

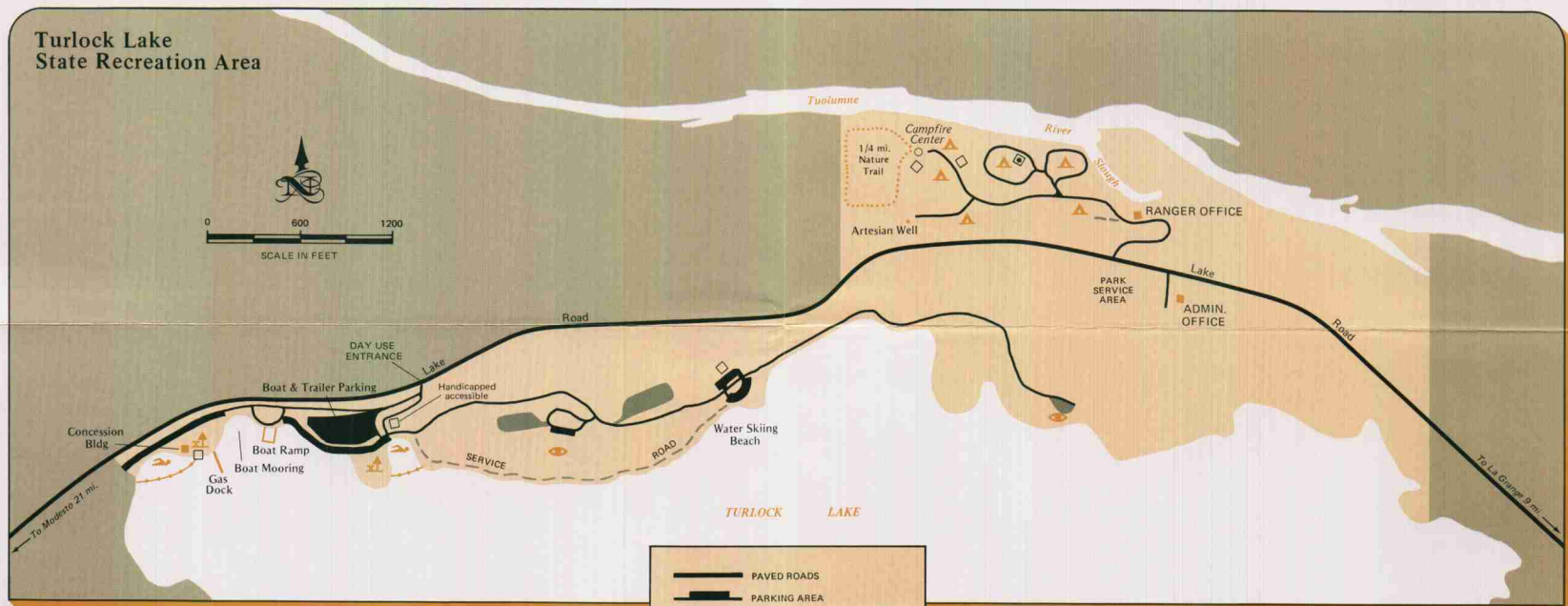
Reservations can also be made by mail using a standard MISTIX application form. To obtain reservation forms call 1-800-952-5580.

Salmon

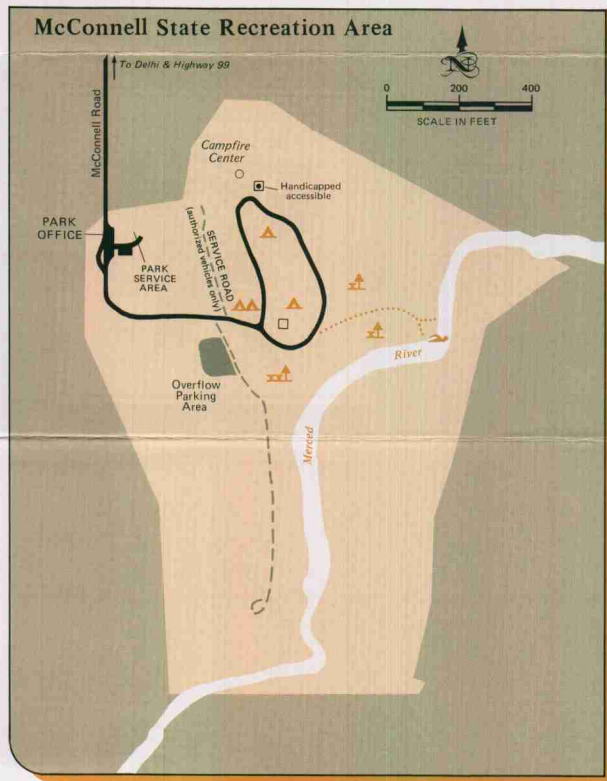


During the salmon spawning season (October 1 to December 31) fishing is not allowed east of Highway 99. The spawning runs are spectacular, however, and viewing is encouraged and highly recommended at both Turlock Lake and McConnell State Recreation Areas.

Turlock Lake State Recreation Area



McConnell State Recreation Area



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